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Summary record of the 5th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 13 October 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Ashe ..... (Antigua and Barbuda)
Acting Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Saha

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05-56569 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 122: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 132: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (*continued*)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the inspection of programme and administrative management of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa (*continued*) (A/60/120)

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Measures to strengthen accountability at the United Nations (*continued*) (A/60/312 and A/60/418)

Agenda item 122: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, and time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures (*continued*) (A/60/342 and A/60/418)

1. **Mr. Iosifov** (Russian Federation), recalling that the 2005 World Summit Outcome had placed special emphasis on the establishment of effective and efficient mechanisms for responsibility and accountability of the Secretariat, said that the existing system had clearly failed to satisfy the Member States, to make possible a genuine assessment of how well the Secretariat fulfilled its functions or to ensure that those functions were carried out at the least possible cost.

2. The aims set out in the report of the Secretary-General on measures to strengthen accountability at the United Nations (A/60/312) were largely well chosen, showing that the Secretariat had at last moved to implement earlier General Assembly resolutions and recommendations, including those of the Board of Auditors. However, the report lacked concrete proposals for a radical change in arrangements to ensure responsibility and accountability. His delegation believed that reconstituting the Accountability Panel as the Management Performance Board was a step in the right direction, and hoped that the Board would be more effective than its predecessor.

3. While supporting the efforts of the Secretary-General to promote effective follow-up of the reports of oversight bodies and implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, the Joint Inspection Unit and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), his delegation had serious misgivings about the United Nations Oversight Committee's proposed range of responsibilities, which included providing advice and suggestions on the priorities, workplans and collaboration of oversight bodies, apparently even including external auditors. It agreed with the Advisory Committee's views on the matter, wished to hear those of the Board of Auditors and urged that discussion should continue.

4. A concern closely and directly connected with responsibility and accountability was evaluation of the work of Secretariat staff. The report portrayed the changes in the performance appraisal system, including the introduction — though it was unclear when — of an electronic format, as a breakthrough, but little had altered. The system still did not amount to a true human-resources management tool, as assessments were generally overgenerous, as in the past. His delegation would like some information from the Secretariat on the distribution of appraisals under the new strengthened system along with details on how far the Secretariat had taken account of the observations on accountability which the Advisory Committee had made in its first report on the 2006-2007 budget.

5. The Secretariat should reflect carefully on how to improve the operation of results-based management, which was inseparable from an accurate system of accountability. In addition, better methods of establishing objectives, tasks and expected results must be introduced. That would enable the Member States to make a genuine evaluation of the Secretariat's work. His delegation would take an active part in future debates on the issue, seeking clarification where

necessary, and hoped that the Secretariat would take account of all the considerations it had raised when taking action on the management issues referred to in the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

6. **Mr. Zongo** (Burkina Faso) said that the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) made a vital contribution to economic and social development, to African integration and to the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The Commission's subregional offices, in turn, made a contribution by helping ECA with overall policy analysis and technical assistance. For that reason, his delegation was concerned at the problems described by OIOS in its report on the inspection of programme and administrative management of the subregional offices of ECA (A/60/120). Any shortcomings which might undermine past achievements must be addressed. The subregional offices could also be made more effective through the clearer definition of their roles, better coordination, communication and information and the provision of adequate resources.

7. **Mr. Tal** (Jordan) said that efforts to improve responsibility and accountability, as a prerequisite for successful organizational change, must be comprehensive, non-selective and sustainable. His delegation considered that the credibility of the process of introducing — or even proposing — organizational change was as important as the aims of that process, and viewed the proposals in the report of the Secretary-General (A/60/312) in that light.

8. While reconstituting the Accountability Panel as a Management Performance Board and establishing a Management Committee and Policy Committee were potentially beneficial, his delegation wondered how the new structures would interact with senior managers to measure their performance impartially and effectively. While performance expectations and time frames for programme delivery were important for strengthening results-based budgeting and management, there must also be measures to deal with failure to meet those expectations and time frames.

9. In an intergovernmental organization such as the United Nations, and in the light of recent events, more oversight was always better. However, simplicity was a virtue: new structures and more layers of oversight could be counterproductive and result in an over-bureaucratic system that would not deliver the quality oversight which the Member States wanted. His delegation shared the concerns expressed in the relevant report of the Advisory Committee (A/60/418) regarding the proposed Oversight Committee, especially its members' independence, its small size and its responsibility for providing advice and suggestions on the priorities, long-term strategy and workplans of oversight bodies.

10. **Mr. Berti Oliva** (Cuba) said that, as other delegations had already raised most of the issues of concern to Cuba, he would limit himself to pointing out that the measures proposed to improve accountability had neglected one important consideration: the Secretariat must be accountable not only in its internal dealings, but also to the Member States. There were clear examples of problems in that regard, including late submission of documents and senior officials' statements on the role of the General Assembly.

11. **Mr. Farooq** (Pakistan) said that the Secretariat must be accountable in its internal business and in its dealings with the General Assembly. Management reform in the Secretariat would yield the desired results only if it was well structured, coherent and undertaken in a way that ensured a clear action-oriented outcome, with timelines for implementation and accountability for meeting targets. Transparency, a crucial component of more effective accountability, was most vital in staff selection and procurement, particularly to ensure that Member States were equitably represented in both areas.

12. Oversight structures must be independent and their recommendations must be followed up. While his delegation had noted the intention of the Secretary-General to set up an Oversight Committee, it agreed with the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the General Assembly should determine whether the Oversight Committee was a suitable response to the request contained in resolution 59/272. His delegation was also concerned that the report of the Secretary-General on the contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, and time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures (A/60/342) focused on the automation of certain processes, gave details of the current situation without providing a timeline and failed to assess the impact of the initiatives taken. It agreed with the Advisory

Committee on the need for more information on measurable efficiency gains and the time-bound plan.

13. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that it was essential for the United Nations to have the appropriate management and accountability systems in place and effectively operating before Member States asked the Organization to take on yet more responsibilities. The reports contained in documents A/60/312 and A/60/342 had been issued before agreement had been reached on the 2005 World Summit Outcome and did not provide the necessary time-bound plan for actual implementation or take account of the Outcome. While his delegation endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation that the Secretariat should provide a comprehensive follow-up report at the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, it also believed that the initiatives that had already been endorsed should proceed with all deliberate speed.

14. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on measures to strengthen accountability at the United Nations (A/60/312), he said that the descriptions of audit and oversight committees in the United Nations system were useful, but did not provide the assessment that had also been requested. He trusted that the assessment would be used by the Secretariat in developing proposals for the independent oversight advisory committee whose establishment was to be considered by the Fifth Committee. He noted with satisfaction that the Secretary-General's report gave a description of how ethics issues had been incorporated into staff training programmes. He and several of his colleagues at the United States Mission had recently taken the test included in the relevant learning module and had been quite impressed by the questions and the information provided. They would like to know who in the United Nations was required to provide proof of having taken the test. The report also discussed the external validation of the procurement system. Given recent developments at the United Nations, including high-profile procurement irregularities, he would like to know the status of efforts to deal with what seemed to be a much bigger problem than most had thought.

15. With regard to the report of the Secretary-General on the contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, and time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures (A/60/342), he said that his delegation was pleased at the news of the turnaround of the United Nations Postal Administration and hoped that efforts to improve the rest of the Organization would yield similar results.

16. The report of OIOS on the inspection of programme and administrative management of the subregional offices of ECA (A/60/120) should be considered under a different agenda item because it was quite different from the broader reports on which he had just commented.

17. **Mr. Ng'Ongolo** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of ECA and its subregional offices, which should play an active role as the operational arms of the Commission, as facilitators of subregional economic cooperation and integration and as important collaborators for the attainment of the goals set by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). His delegation therefore commended OIOS for its in-depth investigation of the subregional offices' activities. He hoped that ECA would take concrete measures to rectify its internal weaknesses, in response to the findings and recommendations of OIOS. One of the most serious external problems was the lack of adequate resources to finance ECA activities; his delegation therefore hoped that the Fifth Committee would give serious consideration to the challenges faced by ECA during its consideration of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2006-2007, including the programme budget implications of the 2005 World Summit Outcome.

18. **Ms. Hurtz-Soyka** (Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Management) said that the United Nations Oversight Committee would be an internal management tool which would aim to provide the Secretary-General with the means to enhance the efforts of OIOS, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) and the Board of Auditors and to ensure that their recommendations were implemented expeditiously. The Committee would suggest solutions and approaches to the Secretary-General with a view to achieving results, as expected by Member States. It would not call into question the independence, quality or relevance of the audit reports and recommendations made by OIOS, JIU or the Board of Auditors; instead, it would be a complementary internal body that facilitated the implementation of their recommendations. Under its terms of reference, it

would have no involvement in setting the workplans or priorities of the oversight bodies. The responsibility of the Oversight Committee would simply be to advise the Secretary-General and to draw attention to the recommendations that had been approved by the General Assembly or accepted by the Secretariat. As a committee of peers, it would by definition be more objective in its treatment of oversight recommendations than a programme manager alone.

19. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on the contribution made by the Department of Management to the improvement of management practices, and time-bound plan for the reduction of duplication, complexity and bureaucracy in the United Nations administrative processes and procedures (A/60/342), she pointed out that it described 23 management improvements that represented a substantial effort on the part of managers in the Department of Management. Responding to comments on the lack of quantification of the impact of the improvement measures, she drew attention to the report of the Secretary-General on the progress and impact assessment of management improvement measures (A/60/70), which provided some quantitative data on the impact of those measures.

20. Regarding the time-bound plan for eliminating bureaucracy and the need for a broader plan for improving the working methods of the Organization, she said that such a plan would be drawn from the proposals on management reform that the Secretary-General would be submitting to the General Assembly pursuant to the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The Department of Management was trying to complete and submit an analysis of best practices as soon as possible. Member States would be in a better position to take decisions once they received comprehensive proposals.

Organization of work

21. **Mr. Iosifov** (Russian Federation) said that, as the matters under discussion included Secretariat accountability to the Member States, he wished to express his dissatisfaction with the interpretation from Russian into English during the course of the meeting.

22. **Ms. Udo** (Nigeria) requested that the information just received from the representative of the Department of Management should be provided in writing.

23. **The Chairman** said that the Committee secretariat had taken note of the delegations' comments.

The meeting rose at 3.45 p.m.